

findings of its authors as a contribution to the broader work examining the relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and democracy. Even within a purely India-specific discussion, the volume does not clearly differentiate its analytic contribution from previous arguments about the “silent revolution” of India’s lower castes (Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Silent Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003)). Despite these theoretical limitations, *The Rise of the Plebians* is an invaluable addition to studies of the evolution of Indian democracy, and will remain an influential reference on the important shifts that its authors have uncovered with such care.

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MINORITY GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA: The Puzzle of Elusive Majorities.
Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series, vol. 19. By Csaba Nikolényi. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. xvi, 175 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$125.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-415-77826-8.

For the majority of its post-independent history, the Indian National Congress has largely governed New Delhi. Since 1989, however, no single party has been able to capture a parliamentary majority. A series of minority national governments, mostly ruled by enormous multiparty coalitions, have emerged in their place. This is a real puzzle given that India has a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral regime which, following Duverger’s Law, regularly produces single-party majority governments and two-party systems in other Westminster-style democracies. What explains this puzzling transformation in the world’s largest democracy? *Minority Governments in India* presents a parsimonious original explanation, employing social choice theories and sophisticated regression analyses, to answer this important question. It makes several valuable contributions to our understanding of modern Indian politics, coalition governments and comparative electoral systems. Yet the argument leaves several questions unanswered that warrant greater attention.

The merits of the book are threefold. First, it presents an original explanation that integrates the Indian case within the wider, theoretically driven comparative literature, its principal goal. Nikolényi argues that the rise of minority national governments in India since 1989 is due to the increase in the number of parties contesting for office that, in turn, is the unintended consequence of a previously understudied constitutional amendment. The passage of the Anti-Defection Law in 1985, designed by the Congress Party to control its factions, ironically encouraged the latter to form their own parties. Second, the author gathers and analyzes an enormous wealth of electoral data to defend his arguments. In particular, chapter 5 presents several intriguing observations that will stimulate further research, concerning the varying propensities of different Indian states to

form minority governments, coalition governments and stable executives (121-149). Finally, the evidence and arguments are presented in generally clear prose, a virtue given that potential readers may be unfamiliar with the often bewildering complexity of India's electoral politics or the models and techniques used to study its dynamics.

Nevertheless, the book invites scrutiny on several grounds. First, although its statistical methodology seems probabilistic in nature, the argument has a deterministic quality that begs several questions. As Nikolenyi shows, there was a dramatic increase in the number of parties contesting national and state-level elections in India after the Anti-Defection Law passed (72, 127). Whether the latter is sufficient to explain the changed electoral landscape, however, is another matter. Specialists of modern Indian politics have identified a number of possible contributing factors: the weakness of parties as organizations due to personalistic leadership and factional tendencies; the increasing assertion of caste, linguistic and regional identities, and their fluidity and fragmentation, as modern Indian democracy has deepened; the emergence of distinct state-level party systems following the reorganization of the federal political system along linguistic-cultural lines. Put differently, the demise of single-party majorities in India since 1989 is arguably the result of complex conjunctural causation. It is doubtful whether the Anti-Defection Law could explain these massive changes on its own, as the author seems to concede at the state level (143). Nor is it clear logically why it made building heterogeneous catch-all parties at the national level "well-nigh impossible" (86). And the capacity of Congress-led minority national governments to outlast rival political formations in New Delhi arguably has more to do with a readiness to undermine the latter, for power itself, than its presumed "ideological centrism" (87) or possession of the "median legislator" (65-70). To demonstrate these claims more convincingly would require greater engagement with rival claims, tracing the interaction of various causal factors at key moments over time. The author critically reviews some of the relevant India-specific literature in the introduction (5-23). Curiously, however, he does not engage its implications for his argument.

Second, the book seeks to explain various parties' coalition strategies by calculating their relative power through a formula, the Shapley-Shubik power score (92-99, 117-120). But it is unclear how this formula explains, as opposed to describes mathematically, the outcomes it seeks to explicate. More substantively, the decision and capacity of different party organizations to form minority governments, join governing coalitions and remain in power reflected their changing strategies, tactics and perceptions. Arguably, the latter shaped their relative power in turn.

In sum, this book makes an important systematic attempt to understand the electoral politics of modern Indian democracy. The wealth of quantitative data and statistical analysis will be of great value to specialists. Greater engagement with the deeper scholarly literature of Indian politics might

have persuaded the author to ground his argument with greater nuance and rigour, however. Hence the book may find greater resonance in debates amongst social choice theorists studying electoral systems, coalition politics and minority governments in the comparative tradition.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE: Ideas, Laws, Institutions and Movements.
South Asian Peace Studies, vol. 4. Edited by Ujjwal Kumar Singh. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009. xvii. 345 pp. US\$29.95, paper. ISBN 978-81-7829-884-9.

Conflicts, and the search for peace, are matters of direct relevance to societies in South Asia. The study of contemporary conflicts and ways to attain peace have kept pace with this policy imperative. The current volume, *Human Rights and Peace*, fourth in the South Asian Peace Studies series, is a useful contribution to the expanding body of literature on the subject. The series seeks to challenge the dominant interests-based and game-theory-structured discourse on peace, by bringing into the equation the practices of democracy, in a push for peace founded on justice. This collection of articles, by scholars and peace activists, focuses specifically on human rights institutions and practices in the South Asia region, engaging with the democratic rights movement and struggles for transformative change.

The volume is organized into three sections: the first, titled “ideas and vision,” sets the scene for the rest of the collection, by examining the relationship between claims that struggles for peace enable and the impact of the struggles themselves on expansion of the notion and practices of rights. This is attempted through a sample of contributions, some delineating international covenants guaranteeing the right to peace, others making a case for peace being a “desirable human condition as well as a goal to be achieved through specific human rights practices” (3).

Section 2, titled “encountering undemocratic laws,” focuses directly on the practices of the state, whilst also bringing attention to the spaces of resistance and the struggles against state practices being waged in civil society. The five contributions in this section examine the formal and informal institutions that the state, often in league with powerful elements in society, uses to regulate conflicts, and contain and control those considered either dangerous or unworthy of the rights due to citizens. Together the contributions in this section highlight the widespread disregard, in conflict zones, of the rule of law by the state itself, and its frequent resort to exceptional laws to provide itself with immunity, whilst in more ordinary circumstances, the state and social actors continue to collude to perpetuate violence against the powerless and marginalized.